



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Police formalize immigration practices with release of written policy in Howard County

The Howard County Police Department is reconfirming its commitment to fair treatment for all members of the community, regardless of immigration status, with the release of a written policy that formalizes the department's practices. The General Order, OPS-10, "Foreign-Born Individuals," was written in consultation with the county's Foreign-Born Information and Referral Network (FIRN).

While the directives in the policy are not new, they are now compiled in one official document to clarify the police department's long-standing practices in immigration-related issues, and to assuage any fears or concerns that may exist.

"We know this has been an issue of concern for some in our community," said Police Chief Gary Gardner. "We want to do everything we can to reassure people in Howard County that our police department does not enforce civil violations of federal immigration laws."

County Executive Allan H. Kittleman played a key role in ensuring the policy would reflect the police department's existing practices.

"This review and subsequent written policy once again shows our police department's continued commitment to protect all who live in, work in and visit Howard County," said Kittleman. "I appreciate the steps our police took by communicating our existing practices with the community and, with the community's input, turn those practices into a written policy that can be shared with our residents. We want everyone to know that our police are here to protect everyone who calls Howard County home."

Council Chair Jon Weinstein promoted the effort to clarify the HCPD practices earlier this year. Weinstein says he believes the effort has led to one of the strongest and most clear policies regarding foreign-born individuals in the state.

"I've had many conversations with Chief Gardner and other HCPD personnel and I was confident that a clear, fair and reasonable policy would emerge," said Weinstein. "Constructive dialogue with people representing Howard County's diverse community have contributed to defining this policy. We now have a collaborative policy that reflects the values of our community and reaffirms our commitment to assuring that Howard County is a welcoming and safe community for all of its residents."

The police department also has created a new "Guide for Victims and Witnesses," a brochure that will be handed out by officers to *all* victims, and includes resources for people who are foreign-born. The handout, which will be printed in English, Spanish and Korean, covers issues like domestic violence, sexual assault, crisis intervention, language services, assistance in applying for U Visas, and many other resources that serve victims of crime and their families.

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“We have been working closely with the HCPD and others to be able to develop materials in different languages, to ensure the foreign-born community has access to the correct and useful information,” said Hector Garcia, CEO of FIRN. “The goal is to diminish fears and concerns that are prevalent today in such vulnerable communities. Enhancing outreach, community relations, and communication will result in increasing the trust between the local authorities and our community, creating a safer environment for all individuals.”

The full policy, brochure and frequently asked questions can be found on the police department’s website, www.HCPD.org.

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